Investigating Transfer Project

Phase II:

Community College Students' Perceptions of Transfer: The Case of Douglas College

November 1998

Prepared by:

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Centre for Policy Studies in Higher Education & Training
University of British Columbia

Prepared for and Funded by the

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Executive Summary
Investigating Transfer Project
Phase II. Community College Students' Perceptions of Transfer

Purpose

In this report, results of Phase II of the *Investigating Transfer* research project are documented. The purpose of this study was to follow community college students over time to determine 1) students' transfer intentions, 2) steps taken to transfer, and 3) experiences related to the transfer process. Phase II was designed to complement the findings of *Phase I: Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University* (Andres, Qayyum, & Dawson, 1997).

Research Design

In January 1997, survey questionnaires were mailed to 433 first year students enrolled at Douglas College. Reminder postcards were mailed two weeks later to non-respondents. A second questionnaire was sent to all non-respondents to the first survey and reminder postcards. The final response rate was very low. Only 54 students, representing 13% of the original survey sample returned the questionnaires. Furthermore, of these respondents, only 25 individuals provided consent to contact them about an interview. Ultimately, 19 individuals (16 women and 3 men) agreed to participate in telephone interviews.

The low response rate to both the survey and the request to participate in follow-up interviews afforded us the opportunity to conduct much more in depth interviews with the participants. Rather than conducting brief telephone follow-ups as originally proposed, longer telephone interviews (approximately 20-30 minutes in length) were conducted. The initial telephone interviews of 19 first year Douglas College students were conducted in June and July of 1997. Because of the reluctance of many interviewees of being contacted too often and the difficulty in contacting interviewees by telephone, only one brief follow-up interview with the same group of students was carried out in November 1997.

To increase the range of responses, a focus group was conducted with another group of Douglas College students. In December 1997, 18 students enrolled in an introductory sociology course participated in an hour and a half long focus group discussion. All interview and focus group conversations were transcribed, coded and analysed with the assistance of qualitative and quantitative software.

Discussion

This report documents the findings of conversations – either in the form of interviews or a focus group session – with 37 Douglas College students. Despite the relatively small number of participants involved in this study, there was considerable diversity in student backgrounds and a

wide range of responses about intent to transfer, use of resources, views toward the community college experience, and recommendations regarding the transfer process.

An analysis of interviewees' backgrounds adds to our understanding of the complexity of the transfer experience. High school students arrived at the community college with little knowledge about the system in general. Students from other countries – in this study Syria and Iran – had "official" backgrounds in the form of transcripts that were largely incompatible with our system. Mothers were required to plan their college experience around their families. Older students entering from the work force confronted a system that was very foreign to them.

This eclectic group of students planned to transfer in a variety of ways. For some students, transfer was simply one of program to program. For example, for one student, the criminology program at Douglas College would take him directly to SFU. Other students planned to transfer either to university, BCIT or a university college with varying degrees of program articulation between the sending and the receiving institutions. For another student, transfer involved Douglas College to Trinity Western University to UBC.

The findings suggest that the notion "intent to transfer" is multifaceted. Although all students volunteered to participate in the interviews based on their intent to transfer, "intent" clearly meant many things. It involved the following:

a. *Intent in the broadest sense of the word.* Responses ranged from "maybe" to a definite "yes."

b. *Choice of a receiving institution.* Students' responses ranged from "I'm not sure" to the identification of a specific post-secondary institution.

c. *Choice of program at the receiving institution.* Responses ranged from "I don't know actually" to a specific program such as "boiler making" or "cardiology tech."

d. *Intended date of transfer.* Again students' responses were as vague as "with the next year or two" or as specific as "this September."

However, the higher the degree of certainty on each of these indicators of intent did not necessarily mean that the student had embarked on the transfer process in a highly systematic way.
The analyses presented in Parts 1 and 2 of this report indicate that resources available to facilitate the transfer experience – including the calendar, the BCCAT Transfer Guide, counsellors and advisors – were underutilized by students. Students reported that they were unaware of the existence of some resources, unable to understand some of the written materials, or both. Advice provided by counsellors and advisors was described in many ways, including "great" "helpful" "confusing" and "frustrating." Regardless of the opinions expressed, there was a sense that students preferred the assistance of a human being rather than being required to rely on written documentation.

Most students in this study appeared to employ a very unfocussed, unsystematic – and in a few cases, almost indifferent – approach to transfer. Students relied on word of mouth, primarily from other students and family members. The calendar was the most frequently used printed source of

material. However, it contained information that was described as "confusing" and "frustrating." Despite complaints about the lack of resources and confusing advice, students did not appear particularly perplexed. It was not uncommon to hear comments such as "I've basically investigated it on my own," and "I don't even know if you have to apply [to transfer]." There was a general sense that everything would work out in the end. As one student remarked, "UVic . . . will know what is going on." Follow-up interviews in November 1997 revealed that over the four to five months since the initial interviews, most students remained unfocussed in their approach to transfer.

In Phase I of this project, a key finding was that of the "shock" of transfer. Students expressed astonishment at the difficulty of university level work, large classrooms, less accessible faculty, lowered grades, and increased competition. In Phase II, both interviewees and focus group participants appeared well aware of the challenging nature of university (and in some cases non-university) life. They expected that the receiving institution would be more challenging, good grades would be more difficult to achieve, and competition would be greater.

Three recommendations for improvement of policies and practices related to transfer offered by students in Phase II were very similar to those suggested in Phase I. In Table 1, comparable recommendations from each of these phases are summarized.

Table 1: Comparison of Phase I and Phase II Recommendations Offered by Students

Phase 1. Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University	***Phase II. Community College Students' Perceptions of Transfer***
1. Development of a user friendly *Transfer Handbook for Students.*	1. Institutions should provide clear information that "the average student can understand."
2. Receiving institutions should provide transfer students with a written explanation for each course that was not fully transferable.	2. Accountability regarding advice provided by counsellors and advisors could be enhanced by a "paper trail."
3. Mandatory advising sessions for all students intending to transfer should be implemented.	3. Mandatory advising was suggested as one way to clarify the transfer process for students.

Other recommendations suggested by Phase II participants included consistency of course numbering across all B.C. post-secondary institutions, more stability in course requirements from year to year, and provision of information about transfer in high school. Finally, students recommended that they should be informed about the entire system, not simply articulation between one community college and one university.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings presented in this document complement the results reported in *Phase I. Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University* (Andres, Qayyum, & Dawson, 1997), the reports of student transfer issues by Gaylord, Ducharme, and Associates (1996; 1998) and the reports of several committees (*e.g.,* the Report of the Task Force on Standards and Processes, 1997). Together with the review of the literature conducted in conjunction with this project (Andres & Carpenter, 1997) and a summary of B.C. transfer policy issues (Andres & Dawson, *forthcoming*) a considerable wealth of information on transfer issues in B.C. is available.

Perhaps the next step is to focus attention on addressing the concerns and recommendations raised in these reports and studies. Research conducted in the near future could be more evaluative in nature. For example, the development of a transfer handbook for students is currently underway. An evaluation study could monitor the use and usefulness of such a document, once it is available for students. Recommendations 2 and 3 in Table 1 could be tested through small pilot projects with an evaluative component at one or more post-secondary institution.

Unavailability of useful information was a central concern to students in both phases of this project. Transfer students are disadvantaged in that they are required to negotiate an additional hurdle in pursuit of their ultimate educational goals. Every effort – in the form of written documentation, advising and counselling services, "transfer information campaigns" – should be made by the BCCAT, sending and receiving institutions, secondary and post-secondary advisors and counsellors, post-secondary faculty, and Faculty of Education teacher education programs to ensure that students can ***gain access to*** and ***understand*** the information they need. Students, as active agents in their own lives, will probably always be responsible for their survival in the system. However, the post-secondary system, through its formal structures, policies and practices, can contribute significantly to student success through the system.

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Special thanks are extended to Ted James and Ron Brown at Douglas College for coordinating local arrangements. Also, I wish to thank Adnan Qayyum and Lorinda Coulter who worked as research assistants on this project.

Finally, this study would not have been possible without the student respondents who volunteered their time to participate in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background to the Study *1*

Purpose *4*

Research Design *4*

A Word About Interpretive Research *6*

Part 1. Interviews with First Year Douglas College Students *8*

Interviews Conducted in June and July of 1997 ..... **8**

Background Characteristics of Interviewees 8

Reasons for Attending Douglas College 9

Intent to Transfer 10

Choosing Courses in College 13

Resources Used in Relation to Transfer 14

Community College versus University Attendance 17

Recommendations Regarding Transfer 19

Interviews Conducted in November 1997 ..... **21**

Part 2. Focus Group With Douglas College Students *23*

Resources Used to Date 23

The BCCAT Transfer Guide 24

Counselling and Advising 24

Difficulties with Resources 25

Recommendations 28

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations *30*

Discussion **30**

Conclusion and Recommendations **32**

Reference List *35*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The transfer system in British is sophisticated and complex. As such, it provides students with many opportunities for interinstitutional transfer. This complexity may also present challenges for students who try to navigate their way through the system. Transfer difficulties, either perceived or real, continue to be reported in research studies or anecdotally. Recently, two large scale studies have sought to better understand the dynamics of transfer among the various types of post-secondary institutions. A series of questions related to intended and actual transfer were included on the 1993 follow-up survey of the longitudinal study of British Columbia high school graduates (Andres, 1995). Forty-eight percent of respondents to this question indicated that they had indeed intended to transfer and further specified the type of transfer they had intended to make. Although respondents identified 21 different types of transfer combinations, 73% indicated that they intended to transfe from community college to university.

Of individuals intending to transfer from one post-secondary institution to another, 65% reported that they **actually did** transfer from one institution to another. However, as summarized in Table 1, almost half indicated that during the transfer process they had experienced a loss of credit for course work completed and over one third reported that they had experienced difficulties registering for required courses at the transfer institution.

Table 1. Problems Encountered During the Transfer

	N	%
Loss of earned credit	230	44
Difficulty registering in required courses at receiving institution	168	32
Decline in grades at receiving institution	119	23
Difficulty getting into residence at receiving institution	79	15
Difficulty gaining admission to receiving institution due to quotas on transfer intakes	68	13
Difficulty obtaining financial aid to attend transfer institution	51	10
Difficulty gaining admission to receiving institution due to low GPA	53	10

"Other" difficulties identified by a few respondents included poor counselling, adjusting between college and university, and errors encountered during the transfer process.

In the same study, 271 individuals reported that, although they had intended to transfer, they did not. Table 2 summarizes the reasons provided to an open-ended question asking them to specify why they did not transfer. Reasons provided by respondents varied; the most common reason cited was unclear or changed career goals.

Table 2. Reason for Not Transferring

	N	% Responses
changed or unclear educational/career/life goals	64	21
couldn't afford to attend	35	12
did not finish required number of courses	27	9
did not enjoy/lack of interest in post-secondary study	26	9
credits not transferable at receiving institution	25	8
entered the work force	21	7
not accepted for desired institution/program	21	7
not yet at the point of needing to transfer	16	5
courses became available at sending institution	17	6
GPA not high enough to transfer	11	4
family related reasons	8	2
Total responses	**271**	**100**

In addition, an assortment of reasons were offered by one or two people, including such things as "personal problems," moving," "suspended from school," and "travelling." Only one person specified the lack of a university within commuting distance as a reason for not transferring.

A second study was conducted by Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1996). By employing 1995 and 1996 data (n=14,534) available from the B.C. college and institutes' *Student Outcomes Survey*, the authors sought to determine the extent and nature of transfer undertaken by graduates of B.C. community college and institutes and difficulties encountered in transferring credits from one institution to another. Overall, 69% of graduates continued their studies and the majority of transfers (62%) were from a B.C. community college to a B.C. university. Only three questions on the survey

instrument were specific to the issue of transfer and the transfer of credits. Of the academic students who continued their studies, 16% reported encountering difficulties with transferring credit from one institution to another. Almost 60% of this group indicated that they were unable to transfer credits. Analyses of open ended comments revealed several other difficulties, including courses not accepted by the receiving institution and discontent with articulation rules. This study was replicated (with a few modifications) using 1997 student outcomes data. The findings were similar to those generated from the 1995 and 1996 data (Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1998).

Clearly, there are discrepancies between the two studies, which may be accounted for by sampling frame and survey items in each study. Gaylord, Ducharme & Associates (1996) analysed data from the B.C. college and institutes' *Student Outcomes Survey*. This survey included a sample of students with "substantial" college experience[1] who exited from B.C. community colleges and institutes nine to twelve months previously. Hence, the age range of respondents in this sample is more heterogeneous. Furthermore, three short questions on the survey instrument were specific to the issue transfer and these questions focused ***only*** on transfer of credits. Although only 16% reported encountering difficulties with transferring credit from one institution to another, almost 60% of this group indicated that they were unable to transfer credits. Analyses of open ended comments revealed several other difficulties, including courses not accepted by the receiving institution and discontent with articulation rules.

The study by Andres (1995) is a longitudinal study of a sample of the B.C. high school graduating class of 1988. The age range of respondents is much more homogeneous (respondents were between 23–25 years of age at the time of the 1995 follow-up). It may be that young students experience more difficulties with transfer than older students. Because the 1995 follow-up was sponsored by the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer, respondents were asked a series of five detailed questions on transfer, addressing intent to transfer, actual transfer, and difficulties experienced before, during, and after transfer. All of the "other" categories in the close-ended questions were coded, which provided information beyond those categories generated by the researcher. In addition, in an open-ended question respondents were invited to respond to the following question: If you intended to transfer from one institution, but did not actually transfer, why not?

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[1] What counts as "substantial" varies by program. For example, Arts and Science students must have completed at least 24 credits, those in Applied programs 75% of their program, and Adult Basic Education students three or more courses.

These studies, along with a large body of literature and research, inform policy and practice related to transfer. Yet, as highlighted by the discrepancies in these studies, the degree to which students experience problems during the transfer process remains unclear and several research questions remain unanswered. These questions include: What is meant by "intent to transfer?" How do students seek information regarding the transfer process? What roles do sending and receiving institutions play in the transfer process (*e.g.,* counselling, providing information, liaising with transfer institutions)? Why do students encounter the problems they do in relation to transfer? Are these problems institutionally related (*e.g.,* difficulties with course transfer, inability to transfer to university because of quotas) or are problems perceptual (*e.g.,* lack of understanding about transfer credit)? In which of the three stages of transfer (before, during, or after transfer) are difficulties encountered? What institutional policies and practices facilitate successful and non-problematic transfer between institutions? What individual student characteristics facilitate transfer?

Purpose

In this report, results of Phase II of the *Investigating Transfer* research project are documented. The purpose of this study was to address some of the gaps in the research on transfer by providing an in depth qualitative account of students' perceptions of the transfer experience. In this study, community college students were followed over time to determine 1) students' transfer intentions, 2) steps taken to transfer, and 3) experiences related to the transfer process. Phase II was designed to complement the findings of *Phase I: Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University* (Andres, Qayyum, & Dawson, 1997).

Research Design

The research design as originally proposed required considerable modification. In the original proposal, the plan was to conduct a mail survey of a sample of first year community college students to determine their intent to transfer to university. Students completing the survey would then be asked whether they wish to participate in a detailed study on transfer. The second step would be to track the progress of approximately 150-200 students who volunteered to participate. Students would be followed in two ways. Brief (*e.g.,* 5 minute) face-to-face or telephone interviews

would be conducted to determine 1) continued intent to transfer, 2) steps taken to transfer, 3) problems, from the student's perspective, encountered during the transfer process, and 4) whether transfer was successful. Second, focus groups comprised of the same groups of approximately 10-12 students from the interview sample would be convened over the course of the first year of community college to explore issues around transfer to university.

In January 1997, survey questionnaires were mailed to 433 first year students enrolled at Douglas College. Reminder postcards were mailed two weeks later to non-respondents. A second questionnaire was sent to all non-respondents to the first survey and reminder postcards. The final response rate was very low. Only 54 students, representing 13% of the original survey sample returned the questionnaires[2]. Furthermore, of these respondents, only 25 individuals provided consent to contact them about an interview. Ultimately, 19 individuals (16 women and 3 men) agreed to participate in telephone interviews.

The low response rate to both the survey and the request to participate in follow-up interviews afforded us the opportunity to conduct much more in depth interviews with the participants. Rather than conducting brief (*i.e.*, 5 minute) telephone follow-ups as originally intended , the coding instrument generated from Phase I of this project was modified and used as a guide in conducting longer telephone interviews (approximately 20-30 minutes in length) (see Appendix A). The initial interviews were conducted in June and July of 1997. Because of the reluctance of many interviewees of being contacted too often and the difficulty in contacting interviewees by telephone, only one brief follow-up interview with the same group of students was carried out in November 1997.

To increase the range of responses, a focus group was conducted with another group of Douglas College students. In December 1997, 18 students enrolled in an introductory sociology course participated in an hour and a half long focus group discussion.

All interview and focus group conversations were transcribed and coded using the qualitative analysis program *Atlas.ti.* Interview data were then organized by theme. Responses recorded on the

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[2] The survey questionnaire was part of a larger project on students success. Questionnaires were sent to 391 students at one university and to 442 students at one university college in the lower mainland, in addition to 433 students at Douglas College. The response rate from students at each of these institutions was 30% which was notably higher than the response rate from Douglas College.

coding instrument (Appendix A) were entered into SPSS to provide a general overview of the frequency of a given response.

In total, the voices of 37 students are reported in this study. In some instances, proportions of individuals responding to any given question are reported in very general terms, such as "the majority," "approximately half," or "almost all." Overall, however, the small sample size precludes reporting proportions any more precisely. Rather, the reader is encouraged to focus on the wide range of "voices" of respondents in this study, which is considerable given the small number of students involved in Phase II.

In Part 1 of this report, results of the interviews with first year Douglas College Students are reported. Part 2 documents the focus group discussion. The report concludes with a discussion of the findings and recommendations.

A Word About Interpretive Research

It must be emphasized that the purpose of this study was to provide an interpretive understanding to the phenomenon of transfer. Unlike research cast in the positivist tradition which aims to verify and test causal propositions developed outside the specific research site (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) the purpose of this study is to "describe systematically the characteristics of variables and phenomena, to generate and refine conceptual categories, and to discover and validate associations among phenomenon" (p.33).

As Tables 1 and 2 reveal, survey data have provided considerable information about the types of difficulties experienced by students before, during, and after transfer. However, due to limitations of survey methodology, these studies cannot address the questions of interest in this study. This study is intended to look between the numbers to provide a detailed account of the transfer phenomenon from the perspective of the student. The goal of this type of research is "neither to predict or control the 'real' world nor transform it but to *reconstruct* the 'world' at the only point at which it exists: in the minds of the constructors" (Guba, 1990, p.27). In this type of research, the subjective experiences of the participants provide a depth of insight that is difficult or impossible to attain by other methods of inquiry (Guba, 1990; LaCompte & Goetz, 1982; Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

It was not the intention of this study to draw a random sample of community college students in order to generalize to a wider population. This study focuses on the perspectives of students who were enrolled in one institution – Douglas College. Although readers are cautioned not to generalize the results of most qualitative studies, the small sample size of this study necessitates extra vigilance. Nonetheless, the students' voices and the feelings and events they relate are authentic. They illuminate the *experience* of transfer, and provide valuable insights into the transfer process not accessible though quantitative studies.

PART 1. INTERVIEWS WITH FIRST YEAR DOUGLAS COLLEGE STUDENTS

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN JUNE AND JULY OF 1997

In June and July 1997, 19 first year Douglas College students were interviewed by telephone. In this section, background characteristics of the interviewees are described, and their intentions toward transfer and experiences to date are documented.

Background Characteristics of Interviewees

All interviewees began their programs of study at Douglas College in September 1996. Slightly more than half the interviewees attended full-time, with the remainder attending part-time. However, understanding of enrolment status was always not clear. In two instances the answer was "I think full time."

Seven students entered Douglas College directly from high school, two students had attended university previously, and the rest had varied backgrounds:

> I just had a baby . . . I was working and then I had the baby and then I had a year off and then I decided to go back to school and then back to work.
>
> Working. . . . Full time. I worked for several different companies in a year sometimes but as a union Joe. . . . You know construction.
>
> I was at the university . . . in Iran.
>
> I was just a housewife.
>
> What you call adult education, and you get high school credits . . . through the adult learning centre in New Westminster.
>
> I was attending an American high school in Syria.

Given the small sample in this study, the diversity of backgrounds is noteworthy. It supports the claim made by Andres & Carpenter (1997) that today's post-secondary participants no longer fit the traditional mold of the young, residential full-time student.

Seven interviewees were enrolled in general studies at Douglas College. The others were enrolled in a variety of programs, including business, communications, early childhood education, ESL, sciences, and criminology.

Reasons for Attending Douglas College

Interviewees were asked why they had chosen to attend Douglas College. An assortment of reasons was provided. Each interviewee presented a somewhat unique reason for commencing at Douglas College:

> I actually had to pick up several science courses that I was missing from high school.
>
> Well, at first I didn't want to go there. I didn't think it was a very big step up from my school, but I didn't get accepted into SFU and I never really applied anywhere else, so I thought it best to go there first, just to get my hands into something.
>
> Mostly it was the location.
>
> It was the only thing I could get to. I wanted to go to Langara but the time it takes to get there from Coquitlam was just to much, I couldn't do it. It was going to be about 2 hours a day so that was why I chose Douglas .
>
> Actually I went to Simon Fraser University for 3 semesters . . . I went there from 91 to 92 and I didn't do so hot and I was required to withdraw after 3 semesters and so I went working for a while and for a few years and now I want to go back but now I want to finish second year at a less expensive [place] and work slowly into it. I am taking university transfer courses.
>
> I have to take some computer courses, so I went [to D.C.] and I got some computer courses and then because of I want to refresh my mind about math and things and do some math courses too.
>
> It was a bit cheaper and stuff and it was like a bit, to prepare yourself. It's not as hard of a transfer from high school to college, so. My parents kind of wanted me to go there anyways.
>
> Because somebody told me that college is very useful for landed immigrant because the ESL program is preferred. Somebody told me. So I chose Douglas college.
>
> I guess I wanted to experience college. I wanted to see if it was different enough from university. The way I thought about it was university is more intense, and there's a lot more pressure. Not that there isn't any in college, but college is more relaxed.
>
> Because I had applied to several universities and the mail system to Syria is not very good. So I needed, I didn't get the acceptance, and so I was going to Canada and I had to go somewhere to university, and so I chose Douglas College

> Oh, because well, right after I graduated from high school, I think my marks aren't in a position to transfer into education, although I am not sure of that because I haven't really applied for it. But I think my marks are not good enough to apply for acceptance.
>
> Time travel is one. And the fact that I have 3 children. And I wasn't sure if I could handle the, well, it's been several years since, I mean, it's almost been 20 years since I have been in school, so it's my way of easing back into things.
>
> Well, because I was in Vancouver and a lot of my friends were going out of Vancouver, Well, I applied there and I only applied to Douglas and Caribou, and I got into both, so I thought I would try Douglas and see what it was like.

Intent to Transfer

Interviewees' responses to the question "do you intend to transfer" reveal that notion of "intent to transfer" is a complicated phenomenon. A few individuals entered Douglas College with the intent to transfer to a specific institution. For others, plans to transfer materialized midstream. And, for a few students, the intent to transfer was present, but vague.

Always planned to transfer

> I knew I was going to [transfer] from the beginning.
>
> It was in the very beginning. . . . . I want to cover my bases. If you can take a course that is transferable as well as you like it and it's less expensive than SFU, yeah.
>
> I knew I was going to [transfer] from the beginning [but] I didn't know that BCIT had the program until just recently . . . [since] May of 1997.

Transfer plans emerged after enrolling in college

> It was probably the end of the second semester when I decided I wanted to transfer, like really, I was really, really wanting to transfer.
>
> Actually that came to me when I was almost finished.

Transfer was at the "back of my mind"

> When I started at Douglas I knew I would transfer some day, once I was past one or two years when I started college. I don't plan to finish College because I know I can go to university.

> It's not like a major goal. It's because of my age and my children, I can't go full force into school, so I have to just kind of see how long that takes me. And if I can do that, get a part time job or something and then I'm going to carry on my education. I don't think I will stop at this point, even if I have completed it. I will carry on.

One student had intended to transfer, only to change her mind during her first year:

> I wanted to take journalism and with the journalism I would have transferred on but Douglas just doesn't offer that program. . . . So at this point I would have to say, no I wasn't going to transfer.

Between the time that the questionnaires were returned[3] and the time of the interviews in June and July 1997, one student had already transferred to BCIT, one student no longer intended to transfer, and two were not sure if and when they would transfer. Five individuals intended to transfer in 1997, and the remainder intended to transfer in 1998 or later. The degree of certainty regarding intent to transfer varied. Some responses were firm.

> September [1997] of this year.

> I want to study at Douglas College 2 years. I want to get 60 credits at Douglas College and after I will transfer university.

Other responses were much less specific.

> Next year if possible

> That's a hot issue. Within the next, say, year or two.

Similarly, some students were very clear about the institution in which they intended to transfer.

> I am actually starting at BCIT this September

> I am going to Caribou.

In other cases, identification of an institution was rather vague:

> I am hoping to go to UBC. I hear they have a really good program there.

> I think SFU.

> Yes, perhaps SFU or UBC.

---

[3] Questionnaires were mailed out to Douglas College students on January 15, 1997. The majority of completed questionnaires were returned by April 31, 1997.

Of those with definite or quasi-definite plans to transfer, nine individuals indicated they intended to transfer to either UBC or SFU, two to BCIT, one to Langara and one to the University College of the Cariboo.

Six individuals had actually applied to transfer. Other responses included "No, no, [it's] not even in the works," "Oh, it would be next year some time . . . . Depending on whether or not I get back next year," and most commonly "not yet." Similarly, only two interviewees had applied for student financial assistance. A few individuals planned to apply; others where prevented from applying because of their parents' income. Others counted on their parents for assistance.

Like intent to transfer and receiving institution, some students were very clear about the program they intended to take at the transfer:

> Cardiology Tech.
>
> Political Science. Actually I am more working towards a major right now. I took a political science course in the September to December semester and the January to March or whatever it was I took another political science course. I am taking another one this semester. It fascinates me.
>
> I am going into computer systems.
>
> I have actually started in boiler making.

And others were much less definite:

> Yeah, I am thinking of going into anthropology.
>
> I don't know actually, but I want to study in the field of Social Work or Librarian . . . I don't know exactly right now.
>
> I am thinking of going into education.

By June or July of 1997, the number of credits interviewees had taken to date ranged from 3 to 50. However, it became apparent during the telephone interviews that the notion of credit was not necessarily easily understood by all respondents.

> I have only taken 3 credit courses so about 21.
>
> Just 2 courses but I've only got first semester.
>
> You mean how many classes? . . . 6 so far.

Regarding transfer of credit, answers ranged from "all of them are transferring" to the following:

> It should be about 60 I think.

> I don't know. I haven't looked at the specifics. As many as I can I guess. I want to try to get a step up on people, but I don't know how that's going to work.

One student indicated that she intended to transfer "zero I guess, I have 9, I guess I have 12 credits from Douglas College, but BCIT doesn't require any of those courses." When asked whether she intended to transfer any credits, the response was "no." For another student, the issue of credit transfer seemed unimportant.

> I have got my transcript from Douglas College, and I have given it to UBC and BCIT. . . I don't care if they transfer it or not, because I think I can handle it. . . If they want they can transfer it. If they don't want to, OK. It's not my problem. . . .I can handle it. If they give it to me I can handle it, if they don't give it, OK, I know something.

Lack of a specific direction led to this non-specific response:

> It depends, I am kind of in Admin management right now, and I am not sure if I want to flip over to counseling, but everything that I have seen on counseling lasts more that a couple of years. It depends if I can find a program that's within about a 2 year range. I would like to become a counselor and stuff.

When the student who had already transferred was asked how many courses he had transferred, the response was "I am not sure. I don't really know. Thirty or something."

Choosing Courses in College

Interviewees were asked why they chose the courses they did at Douglas College. Almost all respondents answered that choices were made for both eventual credit transfer and interest in the subject matter.

> Most of them were required prerequisites. . . . They required me to have a chemistry course so I just went through and found the ones that were best suited to transfer. And that were accepted as transferable . . . . Also I took the biology course with the biosphere. It was more broad. It gave me a better view of different things, like plants and animals and humans and things, a more wide spectrum.

> [I] just took the ones that interest me. . . . I don't want to be bored at school.

> Well I took anthropology 160 . . . because . . .I was interested kind of in that aspect . . . . And the other thing was just like Criminology 100 which you have to take it, English and Psychology. I took Psychology too because I had taken psychology in Grade 12 and I thought it pretty interesting.

> I took [courses] mainly firstly out of interest. I have a construction job and it's not that intellectually stimulating. But I decided to use the noodle. So I took [courses]4 out of interest first of all and I got fascinated with it

> Both, mainly interest, the last two were mainly interest but now it's working, I sort of plan a goal. It's working. I don't really know the resources for transferring but I know they are university transferable courses.

> I have changed from doing my science to arts. I learned later on that I could get my Bachelor of arts and still get into med. school and there's a lot I want to do in arts, anthropology, archaeology, that stuff interest me, so now I had an option of taking both things I liked instead of just the one.

Only one student commented that she was constrained in her choice of courses by the availability of offerings:

> For some of them they were the only courses available for the first semester that I took. . . . first semester I only had 2 courses I actually wanted and then I took electives. I took marketing for an elective. And second semester was the same thing. I got 2 courses I liked and then I had to take something else.

Resources Used in Relation to Transfer

When asked what resources had been used to help them along in the transfer process, several interviewees said "none" or "none at all." Two interviewees suggested that it was too early to seek out resources:

> I really haven't done a lot about transferring. I just decided over last summer what I really wanted to go into.

> No, I haven't actually. I am, I take courses that are university transfer. I did look into it a little bit. I just plan on getting, first of all I wanted to stay at Douglas, maybe to get enough credits just for you know, like a piece of paper on the way to getting a degree, so a diploma or a certificate or some such thing through Douglas College.

The remainder of responses suggested that very few students had a systematic plan in place. Family and friends and unnamed documents appeared to be the most commonly used resources.

> They have one of those little newspaper things they send out. It has all the courses on it. I got one of those and started looking through that. Other than that I think it was basically I did what I wanted to do. I had a little bit of my high school looking into it, what courses they had and calendars and stuff like that, because I was, basically the calendar was the main thing that got me what I wanted out of Douglas College.
>
> I just read some information book, but I don't know exactly.
>
> Probably best would be my sister. She is going through it right now, so.
>
> I cannot remember the specifics about the book [I used]. . . . SFU and UBC have something, like they have something that they print out every year, what you need to go into, to transfer into university.
>
> I have the Douglas calendar, not this year's but last year's, so I know that the things that I am taking are transferable.
>
> I basically investigated this on my own.

Only four students reported having used the BCCAT Transfer Guide. Three individuals who had used the Transfer Guide provided the following comments:

> It was easy to read and really helpful too.
>
> It's pretty self explanatory.
>
> Yes, it was very useful.

The fourth individual stated "I have looked at it. I really don't know. I haven't looked at it in depth." Other responses to this question invoked the following responses:

> The what?
>
> Which one? . . . I have used the one that's in the front of the Douglas College calendar.
>
> I have no clue what that even is.
>
> No, I don't even know what that is.
>
> I may have but I don't remember.

Surprisingly, when asked whether they had experienced difficulties with resources, the majority of interviewees responded "no, I wouldn't say so," or "no, they have been pretty straight forward for me." Two students complained about difficulties obtaining transcripts. According to one student,

> DC's set up about wanting to get your transcripts was a real pain in the . . . Well, it basically, they can access it through the computer and it doesn't take them more than about 2 minutes to do but you have to wait, well, you have to apply in writing, and then it has to go to New West and it takes, I am still waiting for them. BCIT is on hold right now waiting for my transcripts because Douglas College still hasn't gotten them. They lost the form once . . . and they had to process the paper work the first time and they lost the paperwork. And so I had to go back and fill it out again before I could even get them. It was a pain.

Interviewees were asked specifically whether they had sought the assistance of an advisor or counsellor to help with transfer decisions. Approximately half had spoken to or met with an advisor or counsellor, and reaction to counselling and advising[4] was mixed. Some students were very pleased with the assistance provided by counsellors and advisors.

> Pretty good, they have been thorough about the different ways I could go about everything. I haven't actually talked to them specifically about transferring yet. They have been thorough when I was going into general studies and stuff they were good.

> They were probably as helpful. I didn't have any problems getting answers from any of the teachers or staff or anything like that.

> [Counsellors at BCIT] were great. The program that I was taking is actually is under revision and they were really good about giving me the most up to date information and giving me people that I could contact. The program head was really good, he gave me a bunch of different career resources, such as calling the hospitals, he gave me names and numbers for the people in the hospitals, so that was great.

> I talked to the Apprenticeship coordinator for the boiler makers [at BCIT]. . . They answered lots of questions that I didn't have a clue.

Other students were less enthusiastic about their experiences with counsellors and advisors:

> No, in fact I don't believe advisors . . . because one time I talked with one of them, she didn't tell me anything special. The only thing she told me just, you know, was something that I knew before . . . I don't think they are very useful . . . . I went to Douglas College just once and to BCIT two times. But none of them were very useful for me.

> Well, there's a long – you have to make appointments, and sometimes there are a lot of students ahead so it's a long wait, but other than that, they have been helpful, and answered my questions.

> Douglas College, it was kind of hard to get any information out of them. They were a little reluctant to give out information about transferring. They kind of want you to be there.

When interviewees were asked what they could do to facilitate the transfer process, responses were rather non-specific and unconcerned, and appeared to lack any sense of urgency.

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[4] As in Phase 1 of this project, students did not distinguish between the role of counsellors and advisors. Rather, the terms were used interchangeably.

> You pretty much have to do it yourself. I did most of it myself. That was the one part that was kind of difficult. They didn't really kind of set you up in any way. It was just, "OK, you want to do that. OK, this is the person to call" and that was it.
>
> I don't have any problems now, like I have all my courses panned out for this semester and hopefully in September I will be transferring.
>
> Well, in my mind the best way for a person transferring is to get high marks, but I am sure like, if you know more about how to transfer in that would help a lot, but I guess sometimes it's . . . it's just that it's scary.

When asked what actions they intended to take over the next month to help in the transfer process, it became apparent that interviewees did not have clear plans.

> Like I said, it's been at the back of my mind. I am so new to all of this.
>
> I don't know . . . I can't really answer that because I am just starting the program. For what I have heard from various people they were very happy that they took this course, the ones that graduated. I don't know of any that have gone on to the same type of university but most of them that I have talked to they already have jobs.
>
> Well, I have my own counselor, but I haven't phoned her yet but I am going to phone her. I just wanted to get school underway and I was going to talk to one of the counselors at the college and then I also have a friend who is seeing a counselor and I was going to ask him about what he took to get to where he is.

Community College versus University Attendance

In response to the question "was it a good idea to start your post-secondary studies at a community college?" the responses were mixed. Some students were convinced that attending Douglas College first was the best choice for them.

> I think it was good for me because I don't think I was ready for the big auditoriums that I have heard about. Some people just fit right in. But I don't. I think it was good for me to go to Douglas first because it's an in-between step between high school and university.
>
> Yeah, I would say yeah, because it gives me some of an idea of what the transfer from high school to college actually is like, and these days it seems to be a little BCIT is a little bit different again because the trade courses are different but it's just like, it's that more mature kind of a transition, I don't know what you would call it. But it seems like more mature.
>
> I think it has helped me. When I graduated from high school, it would have been such a change from high school to university, but when I go to college, it's more simple, and so I am adapting.
> Definitely. Throw a 37 year old into that and you would have a panic attack. This is a nice slow pace, easy going.

> Yeah, Caribou is a lot bigger and the campus is a lot bigger and plus the classes here are really bigger than at Douglas. Like the courses that I was in at Douglas had maybe 20-25 people in them. It was a lot more comfortable. [At Cariboo] some of the classes have 60-70 people in them.

One student who had attended SFU several years earlier compared his experiences at the two institutions:

> I would recommend it actually. . . . I like the classroom setting a lot better than lecture halls which are too impersonal. You might have a better, I don't know, the instructors seem at least up to par at Douglas College. . . . You can take a transfer for first and second year I don't think it really makes a difference than transferring or not. I would recommend going 2 years at Douglas you know, economics, etc. Before you go to SFU.

Others indicated that upon reflection, they would have preferred to have commenced their studies at university.

> I think it would have been a bit easier if I had gone to SFU first. Well, I think because of the fact that they have the semester program. It's a bit better than terms, you know. So you can kind of, well it's a bit better to pace yourself by semesters, you know, so. I think it would have been better for me to go to SFU. . . . Yep, straight to university.

> It made me angry that I went to the college level and I thought gee, I was told university was different and then I thought, maybe I was wrong, maybe I should have gone towards the university level because I felt Douglas College was treating me like a child.

> Actually I would have preferred just to go straight to UBC because the classes are much bigger and I would be in classes were the people who are there are taking that major as well. Like the classes I have now, they are just for credits and it's not as serious an atmosphere.

Three students were ambivalent. One student had originally intended to enrol in Langara College, but chose Douglas College because of the location. The other student had not yet experienced university and was reluctant to speculate.

> I am kind of iffy on it. The thing is the only reason I didn't choose Langara was of the travel distance. It would take too long and the traffic from here to Delta to Vancouver, it would be too much. And I think that was about the only thing. And that's sort of, no, not a good enough reason to choose Douglas over Langara.

> I haven't been to university so I don't know both sides of how it is. So I think, yeah, after I went to university for a year or a semester there then I would know. I would be better qualified to judge.

> I would say it was but I didn't really have much choice. OK. It was basically the one that offered the courses that I needed. . . OK, this is what I need, OK, you are the only people that offer it.

Recommendations Regarding Transfer

All interviewees were invited to offer suggestions for improvement or recommendations regarding interinstitutional transfer.

> They should have more of a career counselor that is designed especially for transferring. There counselors seem to be more based on programs at Douglas College. They don't really have the information about transferring as much as they should I guess.
>
> For me I would tell them, don't talk with advisor.
>
> I think you have to make sure the courses you are taking are transferable, because I know people who have had a lot of problems with that. . . . Just to make sure you know the requirements, stuff like that.
>
> Try to understand more, like know where you are going, like let's say people take a course like medicine. If you want to transfer into SFU, you should try to know more about the transfer process. I guess just know more. Ask anyone, kind of deal, that would help. That's how I get by.
>
> I guess just to outline your program really well. Make sure you take the courses you want to take and stuff like that. I think I have wasted a lot of time but it's not really on my behalf. It's just because I haven't gotten the courses I'd really like to get, so I am not too sure.

All interviewees were provided with the opportunity to discuss advantages and disadvantages to the community college to university route as they were experiencing it. Advantages included the perception of an easier transition, less pressure, and the experience of attending a community college.

> You get to slowly work your way up to a larger environment. It's not quite as shocking to the system.
>
> Douglas, it's been more relaxed and stuff like that and I can still have a part time job while I go to school and I can get a bit more free time so it's not to bad.
>
> Transfer, first of all you get to experience college. Then you get to experience university and that's the main factor for me. Otherwise college is more social, I think it sort of gets you prepared for you know, the high pressure situations, or you know, the high pressure of life that you will be in a university. You are really going to have to go academics like science or arts really heavily and that's about it.
>
> Instead of university. Well as a freshman, I guess it's like a easier transition from high school than going straight to university, it's sometimes overwhelming. And you get used to the secondary school system.
>
> An advantage is you get more experienced before you go to university, like from college.

Interviewees also outlined several disadvantages.

At Douglas College it was like Monday from 2 to 5 and then Wednesday from maybe 8 in the morning until 9 and then it was all weird hours and you couldn't really get a set schedule, but BCIT is definitely set. You are here from this time to this time and that's it. You can do whatever else you want during the rest of your time, but make sure you are here during those hours.

Maybe the workload might be a little more difficult at SFU. I am not sure. Like the grading may be a little tougher up there, but the workload as far as you might need to buckle down for a heavier work load at SFU, so when you get up there you might get lulled into a false sense of security by getting As or whatever, or the workload might only be a C+ workload at SFU, so you might only get that once you have transferred for the effort that you put in. That might be the drawback of not being prepared for the intensity of, you have to be very academically . . . I see a lot of people in college kind of lackadaisical, you know, a few of them. But I think you have to be more academically motivated up there. Not more so, but definitely, you have to know that you are there for academic studies.

I think it's the time, it takes you a bit longer to complete your program and what else. I guess I think the actual program, it doesn't really transfer for the full 2 years. It's kind of like the first year and a bit more. You are still behind if you go to university. There are still courses you need to take to catch up.

It takes longer to get the degree.

Adapting to the new environment and it will be hard because it's change and it is like a specialty university and you need to have more responsibility for the courses.

When asked to comment on what they perceived to be the greatest challenge facing them, the most common response was the demanding and challenging nature of the receiving (usually university) institution.

I would say the challenge is more the BCIT program. It's a lot more demanding and the technical aspect is a lot more interesting. If you go to Douglas you take the basics, you know. They teach you the same thing they taught 2 or 3 years ago. But BCIT has got more of an up to date, they are always adding to the program, so I think it will be a little more challenging with some of the newer technologies and things like that.

Just competition, lots of applications, I think.

Because you see, I have been told me UBC is very hard to study, so maybe I have to study very hard.

For others, entering the work world presented the greatest challenge.

Probably getting out in the field and getting back to work is going to be the most challenging part . . Well my personal challenge is to try and get to be the best in the class. I am the 3rd best in the class right now. So, I don't know if I can get into that first place or not. That would be a good challenge. That's what I am trying for.

Others focussed their comments specifically on grades.

I guess my grades, I guess I am going into the science program and everything so.

> That my grades might not be good enough to transfer. I don't know, I guess just, just making sure that my choices are wise. I don't know.

Other challenges including becoming oriented to a new environment and getting the courses they wanted.

> Getting the courses you want when you transfer in. I'm not sure how that works because I haven't done it yet, but it could be difficult, whereas if you were taking your third year at a college you would probably get all the courses you want than if it was your first year transferring over. You probably wouldn't get them.
>
> Finding my way around.
>
> Getting used to the place and the school basically.

In light of the findings reported in Phase I of this project regarding the "shock" of transfer, it is very interesting that students who had not yet transferred anticipated more demanding course work and increased competition.

Interviews Conducted in November 1997

In November 1997, interviewees were contacted by telephone to determine their transfer status. We were able to reach all but two of the original sample (n=17).At this time, several interviewees made remarks like "oh, you're calling again so soon" or "didn't we just talk?" By the end of 1997, four students had transferred (one to university, one to BCIT, one to another community college, and one to a university college). Eight individuals still intended to transfer. A couple of respondents were very specific and were able to indicate when they intended to transfer. A few others, such as this interviewee, were vague or noncommittal:

> I am not too sure. I'm actually going to transfer after my first year, but I'm not sure if I can do it. It may be another, after at the winter.

Five interviewees reported that they no longer intended to transfer.

> No, I'm going to go into massage therapy, and there is a private school in Vancouver.
>
> I don't really know. I don't think so.

When asked about the resources used since June or July 1997, a few interviewees responded "none."

> No, not yet. It is kind of a longer process right now. And I am working.
>
> Well, nothing really. I got the application from UBC.

Others reported having used the calendar or relying on "the guys in the course [and] the teachers." Only one person had used the Transfer Guide in conjunction with the calendar. A few individuals had visited a counsellor or advisor.

> I think it was during the summer session. [The advisor] told me to apply to just for general, and then try to take courses that are needed for the program that you want to get into. So.
>
> I went and talked to an academic advisor and I basically went over the courses that I took to see what I should take before I transfer.
>
> I went to [an advisor]. . . . It is on the way to one of my classes.

Overall, interviewees seemed very unconcerned about transfer. Perhaps they were preoccupied with end of term activities which took priority over an event that was in the distant future.

PART 2. FOCUS GROUP WITH DOUGLAS COLLEGE STUDENTS

The focus group session was held during the first week in December 1997 with students enrolled in a first year sociology course offered during the daytime. In total, 18 individuals (10 females, 8 males) participated in the focus group session. Most of the group was either in first or second year; three individuals in third year. These students chose to attend Douglas College for reasons very similar to the interviewees and to those who transferred (as reported in the Phase I document).

> Well for me, for psych major you have to take a first year general psych course at SFU. So that I guess you get an idea of what you want before you plan your major. And it was cheaper, a lot cheaper to come to Douglas for the first year and then switch over to SFU, so that's why I did it. It was all the money.
>
> It was because it was a smaller school so it wasn't as overwhelming. Like coming . . . straight from high school into a huge university is overwhelming. So here you can take a step up.
>
> For me it was location wise, and money wise right now. So I'm going here until I get my diploma and then I'm transferring to university for my last years.

Upon entering Douglas College, 15 individuals intended to transfer. As of December 1997, all but one student planned to transfer to another institution.

Resources Used to Date

Responses to this question mimicked those reported in Part 1 of this report.

> I use Douglas students. Word of mouth . . . especially the ones who have already transferred and have gone through it already. A lot has changed since they've done it. [They say] "make sure you do this, don't, I made this mistake, make sure you don't do this."
>
> My mom helped me a lot. She read through most of the stuff and she talked to me about the different programs and basically helped me along. She wanted me to go to college so she did all the work.
>
> I think UVic does have, (inaudible) I don't know if it is by 1-800 number or if you have to go upstairs and look at the calendar but, yeah, I was looking at UVic and I think they do have a line that you can call. To find out what course you need.

> I am transferring over to Trinity but then I have to transfer my fifth year for bachelor of education at UBC because Trinity doesn't have it. That's complicated, because I have to work out my courses to match Trinity and UBC because I have to meet both of the requirements for that, because I have to, I can't enter UBCs education, bachelor of Education, unless I have a degree that meets UBCs requirements so I have to make sure that Trinity's requirements meet UBCs requirements. So I will end up doing a few extra courses. I think, just to meet those requirements.

The BCCAT Transfer Guide

When asked whether they had used the BCCAT Transfer Guide, the response was "I haven't heard of it" and "it's the big one that has all of them?" Only one student had seen this document, and her response was:

> Yeah, those are good, but the only time I used them was when I was that an appointment. Like when I was entering UBC because I don't have, I think, can I get it at the library?

When I indicated that it was likely that the library had a copy and it was also available on line, the student replied,

> it wasn't that easy for me to get a hold of it. It was easier to go to the school and talk to them about transferring.

Another student commented:

> There is something similar in the back of our calendar that does say take this course at Douglas it can transfer to these other colleges or universities as blah, blah . . . That's all I've seen.

Counselling and Advising

Focus group participants were more critical of counselling and advising services, both at Douglas College and potential receiving institutions.

> Transferring [is a] was very awkward as a mature student, I found, to try and get a college counselor to explain to me what I needed, how I went about it. I found it a very frustrating process. Trying to transfer just from the working world back into school.

> I am talking to counselors, but it's really confusing because every time I talk to someone who is in the program who is wanting to transfer, they tell me different from what the counselors said. But I'm still not one-hundred percent sure about what exactly I need to transfer.
> I . . . have unfortunately had a bad experience at SFU with counselors that I don't have a lot of faith in. But I do have friends who have gone to SFU, who have graduated from the same major. I have a

> friend that is going into the education program at SFU right now, who has a similar major. She is my source. My resource.
>
> I went to a counselor here and said "these are all this course is I want to into, and these are the courses I have taken, I just want to make sure on the right track." And she said "oh sure, in your first and second years, you know, we really don't tell, we let people pretty much do whenever they want." I spoke to somebody who is transferring to SFU and she said "oh, well, you have to take this and this and this." It would have been nice.
>
> No, there was someone from the program [at SFU], that came to the school but it wasn't advertised that she was here and I found out through someone who is in the program who also found out by accident that she was here and so we went to talk to her. But there was only about four people there where I am sure that if people had known about it everybody would have been there.

Problems with advising were described as compounded by what was perceived as ever changing requirements.

> I went to the counselor before I applied for the program, and she told me what I needed. But now when I talked to people who I know who are in the program they tell me that it is different now and it seems to be constantly changing what they want. I'm not sure I'm taking the right classes.
>
> I have gone to a counselor and, three times now, and I talked to the department head of the program and basically I'm going to wait until I've almost graduated, to make sure I have everything, because it seems like every year they change the requirements a little bit. So all I want now is to graduate.

Difficulties with Resources

Focus group participants' concerns about difficulties with resources echoed those of interviewees in Part 1 of this report and those of students who had already transferred to SFU (see *Phase I: Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University*). Difficulties included unclear materials, such as the calendar and problems enrolling in half year courses at the community college.

> What frustrates me because the calendars aren't very clear. Because for SFU, the arts, they say that you just need a good basis of knowledge. . . . but they don't say what I need, they just, they just gave me a list of all these subjects and just said it takes five different ones. And get, you know, a few credits from each. Like, I am thinking, am I going to find out that I can't transfer a lot of these courses. . . it's just the calendar, I think it could be more, easier to read. In a lot of ways. Because that is the first thing that I'm going to go for my information is the calendar. Because it is the most easiest to get. But it is the most frustrating to get the information from.
>
> It would be nice if the calendar was up to date . . . It seems like the students know more.
>
> UBC offers some courses for the full year so you get the six full credits at UBC whereas at Douglas you can't take a class for a full year. So you have to take, like, three but if you don't like it then, you know, you are not going to want to take the next three in order to get six credits. So, like, I just found this out.

> Looking back now at the time, in grade 12 I thought . . . each student had their own counselor at school that once a semester would sit down and say "OK, where you going with this?" But I never got it explained, barely anything other than "OK, make sure you are passing everything." "You know, oh, and you need a French 11 to get into university." Like that was about it. And coming here now, I had, . . . they gave me very very little information I needed, . . . basically to come here and you have got to figure everything for yourself. And it would be some much better and easier for people if they were told how to find out what you had to do. Like, even how to apply to the school. Like, I was given a list of papers – "here you go, here are the admissions papers" – and I filled them all out, didn't know when the deadlines were, I didn't know anything. You know, who do I send it to? You know, I was just lost.

Some programs appeared to resolve confusion by tailoring materials for their program.

> I thought it was totally the opposite. That the criminology program is really easy. There's one sheet of paper that tells you exactly what you have to take. It's really easy . . . It's just one straight forward piece of paper. . . . Maybe there are those sheets for the other programs if you can find them. I think there might be.

Despite voicing numerous concerns about the transfer process, there was a sense that students had a blind trust in the system, and that in the end, all would work out.

> I don't even know if you have to like, apply. Like I have no idea what you're going to have to do. I just hope that once I am close to graduating that they will say this is what you have to do.

> Well, I mean, basically am doing my first two years here, so they have a relationship with UVic so I figure that they will know what is going on . . . because they have sent so many students there.

Also, most students agreed that starting their studies at Douglas College was the preferable route through the system – for them.

> I have friends who started up there [at university] and made all their mistakes and now they are paying for it in terms of GPA and, you know, classes that they didn't think they had to take and the extended time that they are going to have to spend in university now. I would rather do it here, where it is cheaper.

> Right now, because I'm on the waiting list for my program I can sort of, I can choose, I'm not really pressured right now whereas if I started right in university I would feel pressured . . . to get everything done you know, within a certain time limit. And I know my friends, if they don't get their program or like, get into a class for a certain semester they, like, they are so upset. They freak out, and they don't know what they're going to do. I'm just not ready for that stress yet.

> A big reason why, other than money, why I came to college first because I went to a small high school I think that made all the difference in my education because I could go to the teacher for help. I didn't feel like, you know, like I totally knew that if I was confused I could go to the teacher and they would sit me down and talk to me. Whereas in University I feel like it would be me, alone.

Challenges facing them during and after transfer included "class size," a "much bigger institution," "probably harder work too," and "less access to teachers." As two students explained,

> Here [at DC] I know that at least my face is known. If not my name. And . . . the teachers know whether this is me who said something . . . whereas I figure that at University I mean, you are all a bunch of numbers. I mean, you could pass your teacher on the street and they would have no clue that it was you.
>
> [At university, it's] sink or swim.

Several students speculated about the advantages of direct entry into university and the benefits of transferring to university.

> I just think it would have been easier for me because instead of working with Douglas, Trinity, and UBC I would just be dealing with UBC..
>
> I think that one of the positive things about university is that you don't have to like, the back up work I have to do. Like [at] Douglas I am always concerned about what I can transfer, how much I can transfer, how my grades are going to look. Whereas, like, once I get into university some of the pressure of having to look into stuff won't, like, it won't be there as much. Because, like, once you are in the program. . .
>
> I like . . . the idea of University. I just think getting there is going to be very hard. But I really want to have a university experience. I have talked to other people and, you know, that is just something in my life that I want to experience. . . I just might be very very poor when I am up there. I would like to do it.
>
> It is also the prestige. Would you rather have your bachelors from here, the Okanagan University College or the University of British Columbia? Which would have more weight? In a potential job situation. I mean, it shouldn't if they were equal programs but there is still that clout behind it.

When asked whether they believe that there was a hierarchical difference between the institutions, the response was "yeah!" and "definitely."

Recommendations

Finally, focus group participants offered several recommendations intended to improve current policies and practices related to transfer. First, they suggested that accountability regarding advice provided by counsellors and advisors could be enhanced by a "paper trail."

> This is just an idea, [to] make counselors more accountable is them having to fill out, like whenever they tell you, on a form for them, and a form for you, and then they have to . . . sign the bottom. That's what they've said. So that way they know, they can look back at that and you can say "listen, this is what you told me. So can you please go by it." So they're more accountable. I mean, people would forget what they say or can easily make a mistake. . . . . just documenting it and keeping a copy for both people signed, kind of thing. I think it's a good idea.

Access to clear information was also a priority for these students.

> Information the average student can understand, like the transfer guides, it is OK to have transfer guides but so that the average person can understand them, like, someone else was saying that it was confusing. I looked at the back just briefly and I couldn't figure it out but maybe I didn't look at it long enough.

Students recommended that some system of consistency of course numbering across all B.C. post-secondary institutions be implemented.

> I think they should make all of, every course, if it is transferable the same number. They should really try to do that. Like have the same sort of courses in college and just even amongst universities. That would make it a million times easier.
>
> Like, if you take sociology 145 here it should be 145 everywhere else.
>
> It would be complicated but, a lot of work to figure everything out I'm sure, with all the material consistent. But it would be a lot easier. If it was organized by one main person and everybody kind of did the same sort of thing. Like if college was exactly the same as first and second year university. Then that would be a OK. It would be easier to figure out your courses.
>
> Make every course the same would help out a lot.
>
> And also programs the same too from different universities.

Also, more stability in course requirements from year to year would be an asset.

> Make the requirements of stable, like don't change the requirements.

Mandatory advising was suggested as one way to clarify the transfer process for students.

> Anybody who is planning on university transfer has to talk to a counselor. Because I think a lot of mistakes are made, like counselors, academic advisers might not always have the firsthand source of information, but they are better than trying to do it alone. I know what people who try to do it alone and they make a lot of mistakes. Like, I mean, I don't know if everybody in the school knows that you can go to academic advisers. Like that is not something that they tell you. When you start college. You know, if you need, you just have to sort of find out for yourself. And if you don't know they're there, then.

> Well, there is an information . . . session, here at Douglas and a counselor comes in and . . . she gives the general information and then she reads it down to "OK, if you are not doing these particular programs you can go." And I know just for what I am taking it is really confusing trying to figure out how many credits I can take in what. But it does give information.

Finally, students indicated that the flow of information about transfer should begin in high school. Moreover, information about the entire system, not just articulation between one community college and one university should be provided to students.

> When I was in high school in grade 12, we had an academic advisor come and talk to all the students who wanted to go to Douglas and they had to fill out the admission forms to get in and everything and they were saying, "well, you have to check on whether you want to take university courses or if you want this or this or this." And they never explained what the difference is between courses, like, what happens if I don't take university transfer courses? . . . What university transfer courses should I take? What university can I go to? So. . . if they are going to go to all the trouble of having someone go into the high schools. . . they never explained anything. We were bunch of grade 12 students standing around going, what? We had no idea about it.

> One thing that I noticed . . . is that with this program I am in, the criminology program, I went to this information thing and they said "you take this year and then you go to SFU and that's it" so, so maybe they don't tell you what else there might be out there. . . . Like, they don't say that this program that I am in now might be useful . . . maybe they should show you other colleges or universities that it would be useful at, but . . . they pretty much tell you that you take however many credits here and then you go to SFU if you want to continue. They don't let you know if there are other options. . . . Everything that I have been showed has been SFU. That's it, so.

> I just think that the gap between colleges and universities is so big, like, there is just so much . . . I just wish that there was some more interaction, I guess, kind of like universities could let us know what they expect from us. Like, I know it seems kind of impossible but it just seems like it is a totally different world in college. And it just, I mean, that's what frustrates me the most because I'm not sure what to expect.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Discussion

This report documents the findings of conversations – either in the form of interviews or a focus group session – with 37 Douglas College students. Despite the relatively small number of participants involved this study, the diversity of backgrounds and range of responses about intent to transfer, use of resources, views toward the community college experience, and recommendations regarding the transfer process are quite remarkable.

An analysis of interviewees' backgrounds adds to our understanding of the complexity of the transfer experience. High school students arrived at the community college with little knowledge about the system in general. Students from other countries – in this study Syria and Iran – had "official" backgrounds in the form of transcripts that were largely incompatible with our system. Mothers were required to plan their college experience around their families. Older students entering from the work force confronted a system that was very foreign to them.

This eclectic group of students planned to transfer in a variety of ways. For some students, transfer was simply one of program to program. For example, for one student, the criminology program at Douglas College would take him directly to SFU. Other students planned to transfer either to university, BCIT or a university college with varying degrees of program articulation between the sending and the receiving institutions. For another student, transfer involved Douglas College to Trinity Western University to UBC.

The findings suggest that the notion "intent to transfer" is multifaceted. Although all students volunteered to participate in the interviews based on their intent to transfer, "intent" clearly meant many things. It involved the following:

a. *Intent in the broadest sense of the word.* Responses ranged from "maybe" to a definite "yes."

b. *Choice of a receiving institution.* Students' responses ranged from "I'm not sure" to the identification of a specific post-secondary institution.

c. *Choice of program at the receiving institution.* Responses ranged from "I don't know actually" to a specific program such as "boiler making" or "cardiology tech."

d. *Intended date of transfer.* Again students' responses were as vague as "with the next year or two" or as specific as "this September."

However, the higher the degree of certainty on each of these indicators of intent did not necessarily mean that the student had embarked on the transfer process in a highly systematic way.

The analyses presented in Parts 1 and 2 of this report indicate that resources available to facilitate the transfer experience – including the calendar, the BCCAT Transfer Guide, counsellors and advisors – were underutilized by students. Students reported that they were unaware of the existence of some resources, unable to understand some of the written materials, or both. Advice provided by counsellors and advisors was described in many ways, including "great" "helpful" "confusing" and "frustrating." Regardless of the opinions expressed, there was a sense that students preferred the assistance of a human being rather than being required to rely on written documentation.

Most students in this study appeared to employ a very unfocussed, unsystematic approach to transfer. Students relied on word of mouth, primarily from other students and family members. The calendar was the most frequently used printed source of material. However, it contained information that was described as "confusing" and "frustrating." Despite complaints about the lack of resources and confusing advice, students did not appear particularly perplexed. It was not uncommon to hear comments such as "I've basically investigated it on my own," and "I don't even know if you have to apply [to transfer]." There was a general sense that everything would work out in the end. As one student remarked, "UVic . . . will know what is going on." Follow-up interviews in November 1997 revealed that over the four to five months since the initial interviews, most students remained unfocussed in their approach to transfer.

In Phase I of this project, a key finding was that of the "shock" of transfer. Students expressed astonishment at the difficulty of university level work, large classrooms, less accessible faculty, lowered grades, and increased competition. In Phase II, both interviewees and focus group participants appeared well aware of the challenging nature of university (and in some cases non-university) life. They expected that the receiving institution would be more challenging, good grades would be more difficult to achieve, and competition would be greater.

Three recommendations for improvement of policies and practices related to transfer offered by students in Phase II bore an uncanny resemblance to those suggested in Phase I. In Table 1, comparable recommendations from each of these phases are summarized.

Table 1: Comparison of Phase I and Phase II Recommendations Offered by Students	
Phase I. Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University	***Phase II. Community College Students' Perceptions of Transfer***
1. Development of a user friendly *Transfer Handbook for Students.*	1. Institutions should provide clear information that "the average student can understand."
2. Receiving institutions should provide transfer students with a written explanation for each course that was not fully transferable.	2. Accountability regarding advice provided by counsellors and advisors could be enhanced by a "paper trail."
3. Mandatory advising sessions for all students intending to transfer should be implemented.	3. Mandatory advising was suggested as one way to clarify the transfer process for students.

Other recommendations suggested by Phase II participants included consistency of course numbering across all B.C. post-secondary institutions, more stability in course requirements from year to year, and provision of information about transfer in high school. Finally, students recommended that they should be informed about the entire system, not simply articulation between one community college and one university.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings presented in this document extend and complement the results reported in *Phase I. Transfer Experiences of Students from Community College to University* (Andres, Qayyum, & Dawson, 1997), the reports of student transfer issues by Gaylord, Ducharme, and Associates (1996, 1998), and the reports of several committees (*e.g.*, the Report of the Task Force on Standards and Processes, 1997) grappling with transfer issues in British Columbia. Together with the review of the literature conducted in conjunction with this project (Andres & Carpenter,

1997) and a summary of the history of B.C. transfer policy (Andres & Dawson, *forthcoming*) a considerable wealth of information on transfer issues in B.C. is available.

To what extent are these findings relevant to other students at other community colleges in British Columbia? The construct *transferability* is used to address the applicability of the findings to other settings or populations. Transferability of the findings to another setting (*i.e.*, another community college) depends on the "typicality of the phenomenon" (LaCompte & Goetz, 1982; Wolcott, 1973) or degree to which the phenomenon under investigation is comparable. According to LaCompte and Goetz, the credibility of cross-site comparisons depends on four factors: selection effects, setting effects, history effects, and construct effects (p.51). When comparing results of research conducted at other community colleges, it is necessary to pay particular attention the following: the comparability of students selected to participate in the study; the history of relationships between a given community college as the sending institution in relation to its receiving institutions; the milieu of the community college regarding issues of transfer and student success; and the effects of geographic location. Finally, it is imperative to determine whether the construct "transfer" holds the same meaning at other community colleges as it does at Douglas College.

Rather than conducting more research on transfer phenomenon, perhaps the next step is to focus attention on addressing the concerns and recommendations raised in these reports and studies. Research conducted in the near future could be more evaluative in nature. For example, the development of a transfer handbook for students is currently underway. An evaluation study could monitor the use and usefulness of such a document, once it is available for students. Recommendations 2 and 3 in Table 1 could be tested through small pilot projects with an evaluative component at one or more post-secondary institution.

Unavailability of useful information was a central concern to students in both phases of this project. Transfer students are disadvantaged in that they are required to negotiate an additional hurdle in pursuit of their ultimate educational goals. Every effort – in the form of written documentation, advising and counselling services, "transfer information campaigns" – should be made by the BCCAT, sending and receiving institutions, secondary and post-secondary advisors and counsellors, post-secondary faculty, and Faculty of Education teacher education programs to ensure that students can ***gain access to*** and ***understand*** the information they need. Students, as active agents in their own lives, will probably always be responsible for their survival in the system.

However, the post-secondary system, through its formal structures, policies and practices, can contribute significantly to student success through the system.

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Appendix A
Douglas College Interview Code³ook

DOUGLAS COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDY – CODING SCHEME FOR INTERVIEW DATA

June, 1997

INTID: _____

Student Characteristics:

1. Sex:

0 = Male
1 = Female

2. Educational Trajectory (EDTRAJ)

1 = high school to DC to SFU
2 = non-school to DC to SFU
3 = other college to DC to SFU
4 = other trajectory
5 = university to DC to SFU

3. Program Specialization at Receiving Institution (RECSPEC)

1 = business
2 = communications
3 = education
4 = general studies
5 = sciences
6 = criminology
7 = fine arts
8 = psychology
9 = history
10 = political science
11 = physical education

4. Declared major (DECLMAJ)

1 = before transfer
2 = after transfer

5. Year commenced at Douglas College (STARTDC) _____ (month)
_____ (year)

6. Year planning to commence at receiving institution (STARTREC) _____ (month)
_____ (year)

7. Full -time _____
Part-time _____
8. Reason for starting at DC (REASDC)

1 = college as second chance (lower entrance requirements)
2 = language requirements (TOEFL)
3 = cheaper cost at college
4 = college as stepping stone
5 = reputation of college as easier
6 = geographically closer
7 = learning disability
8 = no previous experience in post-secondary education
9 = refused university admission
10= not specified
11 = no particular focus
12 = inability to transfer previous univ. credits to university

Before Transfer

9. Resources used (RESOURC)

1 = Douglas Calendar
2 = Transfer Guide
3 = receiving inst. Calendar
4 = Counselor at DC
5 = academic advisor at DC
6 = Instructor at DC
7 = Counselor at receiving inst.
8 = Advisor at receiving inst.
9 = professor at receiving inst.
10 = administrative personnel at receiving inst. (other than above)
11 = student services office at Douglas
12= workshops at DC
13= brothers and sisters or other family members
14= other students who had or were going to transfer to receiving inst.
15= brochures or handouts provided at DC
16= brochures or handouts provided at receiving inst.
17= students who had already transferred
18 = receiving inst. guide-calendar
19 = DC calendar confusing

10. Difficulties with resources (RESDIFF)

1 = receiving inst. calendar confusing
2 = various types of admission confusing
3 = lack of assistance from parents deciphering
4 = reluctant to approach counselors / advisors
5 = must plan transfer strategy (i.e. university to transfer to) well in advance
6 = prerequisites
7 = BCCAT transfer guide confusing
8 = BCCAT transfer guide not up to date
9 = incorrect information provided by counselors
10=differences between 100 / 200 / 300 / 400 level courses
11=difference between departments (e.g. psych. in arts vs. psych. in science)
12=learning all the different resources (e.g. finding out about the BCCAT transfer guide
13=understanding the transfer mechanism
14=institutional organization confusing
15=lack of personal focus made resources less than helpful
16=no real systematic use of resources
17= no one person/resource holds all the information

11. Factors facilitating transfer (FACILIT)

1 = being able to do everything over the phone
2 = counseling at DC
3 = receiving inst. calendar
4 = receiving inst. registration book
5 = DC calendar
6 = helpful staff registrar's office
7 = D.C. workshops
8 = counselling
9 = talking with people
10 = transfer guide

12. Plans or intentions to transfer (INTEND)

1 = since or before (from outset) beginning at DC
2 = during studies at DC
3 = upon completion at DC

13. Plan to transfer to (TRANSTO)

1 = SFU
2 = UBC
3 = BCIT
4 = UVic
5 = university outside B.C.
6 = another c.c.
7 = a university college

14. Applied to (APPLY)

1 = SFU
2 = UBC
3 = BCIT
4 = UVic
5 = university outside B.C.
6 = another c.c.
7 = a university college

15. Reasons for choosing courses at DC (COURSEDC)

1 = took courses that were transferable
2 = took courses specific to a program at DC
3 = took courses specific to receiving inst. program of study
4 = took courses for interest
5 = took courses to fulfill requirements for associate degree
6 = no clue
7 = took easy courses
8 = took courses that could get into

16. Role of advisors and counselors DC (COUNSDC)

1 = negative experience
2 = indifferent
3 = positive experience

17. Role of advisors and counselors at receiving inst. (COUNSREC)

1 = negative experience
2 = indifferent
3 = positive experience

18. Negative experiences with counselling/advising were (NEGCOUNS)

1 = wrong information
2 = out of date information
3 = no information
4 = inaccessible hours of operation
5 = not enough information
6 = overwhelming information
7 = inconsistent information

19. Positive experiences were (POSCOUNS)

1 = provided information verbally about what courses to take
2 = handouts about exact courses needed for specific programs
3 = information about where to look in calendar and transfer guide

20. Applied to receiving inst. – general institutional admission (APPLYREC)

0 = no
1 = yes

21. Acceptance in desired program (ACCPTPRG)

0 = not accepted
1 = accepted

22. Why not accepted? (NOACCEPT)

1 = GPA too low
2 = did not have prerequisites
3 = applied too late
4 = quota full
5 = difficulty transferring credits

23. Total number of credits taken before transfer (CREDTAKE) _____

24. Number of credits transferred (CREDTRANS) _____

25. Have you sought financial aid? (FINAID)

0 = no
1 = yes

26. What type of financial aid was sought / given? (WHATFIN)

1 = student loan
2 = scholarship

27. Were their difficulties obtaining financial aid? (AIDDIFF)

1 = no
2 = yes

28. What was the difficulty (or difficulties)? (AIDSPEC)

1 = GPA too low
2 = unclear about criteria for certain scholarships
3 = was a part-time student at two institutions simultaneously
4 = parents' income
5 = was working, but quitting to go back to school

29. Approval of trajectory: Was it useful to start at Douglas? (TRANGOOD)

0 = no
1 = yes

30. If yes, why? (WHYGOOD)

31. Given what you have experienced so far, do you have any recommendations about the transfer process (IMPROVE)?

32. So far, what do you see as the advantages of transfer (ADVANT)?

33. So far, what do you see as the disadvantages of transfer (DISADV)?

34. What are the biggest challenges facing you when it comes to transfer (CHALLENG)?